

Marine Recorder's Report 2013.

Following Jan Light's departure from the recorder post there was something of an inter-regnum, during which Bas Payne ably provided a hub for communication and kept things ticking over, but the role was not being actively promoted for some 18 months or so. Hence, upon being accepted by the Society as the new postholder, I was somewhat concerned that a degree of momentum would have been lost. Fortunately this has proved not to be the case, quite the opposite in fact, and if every year is as active and productive as 2013 then pursuing the role of the Society's marine census recorder is going to be a very interesting challenge indeed.

There were a few items pending from 2012 which are worthy of note, all involving opisthobranchs. Recent advances in underwater digital photography have massively improved the popularity and recording of nudibranchs in particular. It is therefore somewhat ironic that recent new records of the dorid *Geitodoris planata* (Alder & Hancock, 1846), the first for Yorkshire, were actually intertidal in rockpools (Whittaker, D.E. 2013 *The Naturalist* 138: 82-84). This species is common in the Mediterranean, its British distribution being focussed on the southwest; there are few old, disputed Scottish reports but these new confirmed records of a number of individuals now place the species firmly in the North Sea.

While some species are extending their distribution northwards within the UK, others are apparently colonising our islands for the first time. One such, another dorid, is *Cadlina pellucida* (Risso, 1826), a rather attractive little ivory-coloured sea slug with black gills and rhinophores. First recorded in Britain by David Kipling in 2011 from The Lizard it was photographed again off Hilsea Point, South Devon in 2012 by Allen Murray and Alex Jacobs. It will be intriguing to see if further records of the species are reported from the southwest in forthcoming years to develop a picture of the extent and rate of colonisation.

The online Facebook group "NE Atlantic Nudibranchs" (www.facebook.com/groups/NE.Atlantic.nudibranchs) is a very successful forum populated principally by underwater photographers and a valuable source of information, and images, relating to species from British and Irish waters as well as further afield. One of its pioneers is Bernard Picton, who will be known to many within the Society. Another leading contributor is Jim Anderson of Linlithgow, Scotland, who also runs the Scottish Nudibranchs website (www.nudibranch.org/Scottish%20Nudibranchs) and kindly shares his records with the Society. Personal first records for him in Scotland in 2012 were: *Cuthona nana* (Alder & Hancock, 1842), an elusive species which specialises in grazing the hydroid *Hydractinia* growing on shells inhabited by hermit crabs; *Doto hystrix* Picton & Brown, 1981, also a first record for the Society's dataset; *Aegires punctilucens* (d'Orbigny, 1837), almost certainly under-recorded as its primary host, the sponge *Leucosolenia*, is common but the slug is very well camouflaged; and *Philine pruinosa* (Clark, 1827), another very infrequently recorded species, a cephalaspid rather than a nudibranch.

Moving into 2013, the nudibranch theme continues as yet another coloniser from the south was discovered and reported in March by regular contributor and prolific wildlife photographer David Fenwick (with Rosemarie Caroline Tucker). This time it was a first British record for the small and relatively recently described aeolidian *Calma gobioophaga* Calado & Urgorri, 2002, from Carnsew Pool in Hayle, Cornwall. Carnsew Pool is a rather unusual site, being a large (550m x 250m) shallow body of water fed solely by tidal marine water. It may be the shallow nature of the pool means it tends to be slightly warmer than the water temperature out at sea and so presents an opportunity for potential immigrants from the warmer south. The mollusc was found amongst goby eggs under a stone and photographed in situ then, still on site, photographed in a small container of water against wrack. Not sure of the identification or its significance at the time, David and Rosemarie did not collect and preserve the specimen, but later online consultation using their excellent images enabled one of the species' original describers, Gonçalo Calado, to confirm the identification. David suspects

the eggs on which the specimen was found were those of the Rock Goby, which is interesting in itself as some sources suggest *C. gobioophaga* feeds exclusively on the eggs of Black Goby (also recorded from Carnsew Pool), potentially adding to the known biology of the species.

Particularly of note in 2013 was the description of three species new to science, based on specimens from British and Irish waters in the area of Rockall Bank (from where a number of new mollusc species - mainly micros - have been described in recent years). David McKay, of Portnockie on the southern coast of the Moray Firth, is a very active worker on British and Irish mollusca who has a number of connections within the fishery industry. David maintains close links with the Marine Scotland Science Laboratory in Aberdeen, who have been conducting an ongoing survey of fishing grounds around Rockall with their research vessel FRV Scotia. Periodically, David inspects samples of mollusca collected essentially as by-catch by the Scotia during these surveys and was intrigued by specimens of *Volutopsis* which seemed to show consistent differences from the usual *V. norvegicus* (Gmelin, 1791). Further research resulted in the description, in the Society's own journal, of *V. scotiae* Fraussen, McKay & Drewery, 2013 (*J. Conch.* 41(4): 453-460), characterised by spiral sculpture and a pattern of axially orientated bands or blotches.

Evidently not satisfied with the discovery of one new macrospecies, David then came across two species of bivalve, both well over 10mm in length, from a further Rockall sample taken by FRV Scotia, neither of which he recognised. Again suspecting they were something very noteworthy, David consulted Graham Oliver at Cardiff and they were found to be new chemosymbiotic species providing the first direct evidence of hydrocarbon seeps in the vicinity of Rockall, making the discovery particularly significant from an environmental perspective. The new species are the vesicomyid *Isorropodon mackayi* Oliver & Drewery, 2013 and a thyasirid, *Thyasira scotiae* Oliver & Drewery, 2013 (*J. Mar. Biol. Ass. UK* 94(2): 389-403).

David's work is quite fascinating and he fully deserves the accolade of having a species named after him in recognition of his efforts. During 2013 he has very kindly shared with the Society a large number of marine records, obtained utilising a variety of methods. He has described in detail (McKay, D.W. 2012 *Pallidula* 42(2): 20-23) his experimentation in recording *ex pisce* in British waters, most particularly from the guts of haddock caught in deep water. The gut material he gathers, from both working trawlers and the FRV Scotia, is generally frozen quite fresh, so processing it is perhaps not quite as malodorous as may be imagined and is hugely worthwhile as the shelled species found are often very noteworthy and in surprisingly good condition. Haddock are bottom-feeders and tend to gulp their invertebrate food whole, hence their suitability as a source of material. Another notable source of records, though not strictly *ex pisce*, is the mud often found in the mouths and gill pouches of monkfish when trawled.

In August 2013 several Society members participated in the Strangford Lough bioblitz, very ably organised by Julia Nunn. The nature of the bioblitz, to record as many taxa as possible from the Lough in the week available, brought together a multidisciplinary team with a variety of expertise and experience in different taxonomic groups and included SCUBA divers, representatives of the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment and students and staff of the Queen's University Marine Laboratory, whose Portaferry premises were used as the headquarters for the event. It provided a fantastic opportunity for the Society members present to investigate the rich biodiversity of the Lough in the company of very enthusiastic and likeminded colleagues, many of whom had expertise in groups other than the mollusca, providing a fertile mix of inspiration and fascination for all. Through a variety of recording methods, with the input of different specialisms and visiting a selection of habitats, a very wide range of species records was amassed throughout the week, although a relative sparsity of turrids was noticed. Incidentally, some participants (Rosemary Hill, Ron Boyce, John Llewellyn-Jones and Celia Pain) had spent the previous week taking littoral samples

from numerous sites around the coast of Northern Ireland, providing a further series of useful records.

At the end of the bioblitz week several samples were taken away for analysis at home. The team from the Department of the Environment had provided four samples taken from the offshore bed of the Lough by a grab, which had yielded some interesting records during the week itself, and some of the SCUBA divers had also collected offshore substrate samples. John Fisher later analysed some of this material in great detail, revealing some particularly noteworthy results. The tiny gastropod *Tjaernoia [Tornus] unisulcata* (Chaster, 1897) is another species likely to be far more widespread than current records suggest, due to its very small size and completely sublittoral habitat, but John found a number of specimens in one of the grab samples, a couple of which looked fresh, suggesting a living population in the Lough, just the second record of the species from Ireland.

Particularly when doing microscopic analysis of shelly grit samples, the presence and identity of juvenile specimens, especially those of bivalves, can be a source of much frustration. Fortunately John persisted in investigating some very small bivalves from one of the grab samples which he was struggling to identify and, like David McKay, enlisted the assistance of Graham Oliver, who confirmed them as adults of the tiny yoldiid *Microgloma pusilla* (Jeffreys, 1879). The specimens had obviously been alive when taken by the grab, which interested Graham as the species is normally regarded as an inhabitant of deep water (200m+) on the continental slope and beyond, whereas these specimens were taken at just 27.5m depth in Strangford Lough.

Returning to the nudibranchs, on 2nd August local diver Sue Daly was exploring the sublittoral shore of the islet of L'Etac off the south coast of Sark when she noticed something she didn't recognise. Thinking it was a sponge covered in silt she wafted at it to clear the sediment only for it to detach from the wall of rock, revealing itself as a mollusc. Sue's excellent photographs allowed subsequent identification of the rare species *Atagema gibba* Pruvot-Fol, 1951. Despite the aforementioned increase in underwater photography, records of this species remain elusive; it is neither small nor from inaccessibly deep water, but is well camouflaged and Britain is undoubtedly at the northern limits of its range.

Sue is a new contributor to the Society's marine dataset and it is encouraging to welcome new recorders. Another new contributor in 2013 was Society member Paul Evans, of Stafford. Paul took the time to write regarding a number of interesting bivalve finds he has made on his beachcombing around Britain, including a possible *Astarte montagui* (Dillwyn, 1817) from Harlech which, although beach worn, was subsequently confirmed and became only the second Welsh record of the species in the Society's dataset. Paul has subsequently provided a number of further beachcombing records and demonstrates that this still very much has a place in the Society's recording scheme.

Many will be aware that the Society makes its dataset openly available via the National Biodiversity Network (www.nbn.org.uk), a very useful resource utilised by many; our own Bas Payne has used it extensively in preparing lectures on changes in species distributions (such as his Presidential address after the 2012 AGM). As an example of the value of this, and also to demonstrate how common species records can potentially be overlooked if one focusses only on scarcities, subsequent to one of Bas' talks in Devon the Society received a number of records including what is surprisingly the first North Devon record for *Crepidula fornicata* (L., 1758), from Westward Ho!, recorded by Janice Whittington of Bideford.

As Bas demonstrated, the flexibility of the NBN online facility is such that it makes tracking changes in distribution very accessible. The saltmarsh specialist *Assimineia grayana* Fleming, 1828 has significantly extended its range in Britain and Ireland in recent years and new records continue to be accepted with interest. Regular contributor and exceptional molluscan photographer Ian Smith (many of his excellent images can be viewed on the Society's website) conducted a detailed survey

of the Mersey, Dee, Conwy and Clwyd estuaries and provided a large number of new records for the species, demonstrating some well-established populations of what was, until recently, considered an exclusively east coast inhabitant. Interestingly, the survey found no *A. grayana* records in the Conwy estuary and tidal river – but for how long?

Finally, it is interesting to note how frequently reports are made of unusual finds which turn out to be foreign seashells which have evidently found their way onto our beaches via a human vector: a *Conus* from Northumberland; a Caribbean *Chione* from mid Wales; an Indian Ocean *Atys* on the beach at Weymouth; even an Asian *Meretrix* mistaken for a fossil in Essex. These are all thought to arrive dead perhaps via the aquarium trade, in beach bags after a foreign trip, maybe as part of a piece of surfer's jewellery. One can only speculate, but with increasing foreign travel and trade such reports seem to be on the increase and recorders have to be careful not to be duped.

Simon Taylor, February 2014